

Rainy Night by **ObeyDontStray**

Category: Stranger Things - Fandom

Genre: AU, F/M, Park ranger/hiker au

Language: English

Characters: Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers

Relationships: Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-12-27

Updated: 2017-12-27

Packaged: 2022-04-03 15:03:16

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,392

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Joyce Byers is not a very good hiker.

Rainy Night

Author's Note:

A secret Santa '17 gift for mossdonatella on tumblr!

Joyce was helplessly lost. And injured.

In the dark rainy night she had lost sight of the trail, wandered off into the deep woods. Frustration and fear settled in her bones as she sat on a nearby log. The wind was howling so, she knew there would be no way to pitch her tent.

There was no means of shelter anywhere and she brushed the wet hair from her face, the windy rain stinging her face.

The knees of her jeans were ripped to shreds, her knees scraped and bloody from where she had fallen in the river. Her ankle twisted from a tree root. She couldn't hobble far. Now she sat cold and shivering in the open rain in utter defeat, her rain coat little shelter from the rain.

Until she remembered the flare gun in her backpack. She knew the ranger station wasn't far away, could they possibly see her?

She retrieved her gun, aimed it as far up as she could, and shot. It lit up the air momentarily and she sighed, shoving the spent gun back into her pack.

Now we pray.

She huddled into a ball with her back against the log, her pack blocking the blowing rain from her face.

Much later she had nearly fallen asleep when she heard the voice. A man's voice calling out from the darkness.

"Hello! Is someone in distress? I saw the flare."

"Yes! I'm here! I'm here!"

A flashlight illuminated the area she was and she sat up to wave her

arms. A figure stepped out of the shadows. A tall, broad shouldered man.

"Help me please, I'm injured!"

He walked over to her, reached out his hand. "Can you walk, ma'am?"

"I think I twisted my ankle, I can't put pressure on it."

He nodded and reached to lift her. "I'm going to take you to my atv, okay? This storm is nasty, you can bunk at the station for the night." She nodded and allowed him to lift her. He loaded her and her gear onto the bright orange atv before climbing on himself.

Wet, injured, and tired, Joyce held onto the man's middle for dear life as the road back to the station.

Joyce awoke in an unfamiliar place, almost forgetting where she was. The area was a log cabin and she was on a couch in what she assumed was the main room. Her muddy boots and wet socks had been removed and her injured ankle wrapped. She shivered under the blanket, her wet clothes clinging to her.

"Hello?" She called out faintly.

A handsome, bearded face with bright blue eyes appeared around a doorway. "Oh! You're awake!" He said with a half smile. "If you have dry clothes, the bathroom's past that door over there." He said gesturing towards a door in the back.

Joyce frowned. "I fell in the river. Everything got soaked."

He stepped from around the doorway. He had a mug of coffee in hand and he drank from it while he thought. "I suppose one of my shirts would look like a dress on you." He chuckled. "Best I can offer. Not very modest I'm afraid."

"I'll gladly take you up on it." She said, stumbling over her words as she shivered.

He walked through the room, headed for a different door at the back.

"You know you're really lucky I saw that flare. We were just switching shifts. Benny's passing out for the night." He disappeared into the next room and quickly reappeared with a white henley.

He was right. It looked like a dress. She felt like a child in their father's clothes. She huffed at herself in the bathroom mirror as she twisted her hair up into a messy bun. Stupid, stupid. She thought experience camping with her father when she was younger qualified her for going out on her own. Now here she was with a swollen, twisted ankle in a park ranger's oversized shirt.

She limped back into the room and found him sitting on the couch, his socked feet resting on the coffee table in front of him while he watched tv. He gestured to the end of the table. "Coffee and doughnuts okay?" He asked.

"You're a godsend-" had he told her his name?

"Jim Hopper. But everyone calls me Hop." He said as she limped back to the cot.

"I'm Joyce Byers."

"Hows the ankle, Joyce?"

She sat and rolled it lightly in the ace bandage he had wrapped it with. "The pressure feels nice. Thank you. For taking care of me."

"That's my job." He smiled. "Park ranger to the rescue." She smiled to mirror his.

Both of them fell into watching a rerun of Gunsmoke together as they silently sipped their coffee. Joyce was warm in the thermal blanket he had given her. He sat with his feet crossed on the table, dressed in a black henley and denim. They were sitting just close enough that she could smell his woodsy, leather scented cologne.

The storm raged outside, the wind and rain pounded the windows. Occasionally the radio in the corner crackled with messages, startling her but not fazing him. A weather warning flashed across the bottom of the screen cautioning severe weather.

"Joyce, I think you were the only person trying to camp in my park tonight, I only saw one car parked down at the base of the mountain."

"I didn't check the weather." She admitted. "Stupid move."

"Things happen." He said. "You don't know until you learn."

"Well, I'm never camping again." She said mournfully.

"You just need someone to show you how." He said, looking at her with those beautiful blue eyes of his. Joyce was caught off guard and forgot the comeback remark she was going to make. He was right, she had no clue what she was doing.

The pair fell into easy conversation, like old friends catching up. She noticed when he shifted his body until he was open to her, his arm stretching across the back of the couch so that his fingers were nearly brushing her shoulder.

It was after midnight before either of them looked up at the clock.

"Take my bed, I'll take the couch." He offered.

"No, no! Couch is fine!"

"You're barely dressed, my bed is warmer."

"I can't put you out of your own bed!" She protested.

So, unable to decide, they watched more tv. And when he fell asleep sitting up she lay down across the couch to lay her head on his thigh. She'd enjoy him for a few minutes. Just a few minutes. Then she'd wake him up and insist he go climb in his own bed.

She curled up and pulled the blanket up around her shoulders. Just a few minutes. Then she'd wake him.

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It was he who woke her. She squinted in the morning light. "Shit! I'm sorry! I meant to wake you up!" She apologized.

He rolled his neck a few times, hunched and unhunched his

shoulders. "It's okay, I kind of died on you. I wish you would have taken the bed though, you would have been much warmer."

A few strands had fallen out of her bun and he pushed them back from her face, tucked them behind her ear.

"I uh, thanks for letting me spend the night." She thought of her clothes she had hanging in the bathroom to dry. "I guess I should head back to my car." When she stood she winced in pain.

"I can take you down the mountain on my atv." He offered. "But let me make you breakfast first." He thought about it. "I seldom get visitors. It was nice, having you here." He admitted. "You can stay longer, you know. Until your ankle is better."

She raised her eyebrows at him. "What if I'm an axe murderer or something?"

"You're injured, what are you gonna do? Limp me down and stab me?" He teased lightly.

"Fair point. What if you're an axe murderer?" She asked.

"I don't see any axes around." He said with a wink before he stood. "Sit back down, I'll make breakfast."

He stopped at the doorway, turned around to look back at her.

"By the way, if you wanted to cuddle all you had to do was ask." He teased. "I wouldn't say no."